Dek Unu Magazine

May 2025

Growing Together

Marthanna Yater

Cover **Twins Yet Individuals** ©Marthanna Yater

Eleven

This is *Dek Unu Magazine*. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues in each publication year. Dek Unu publishes the work of a new artist-photographer in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at Dek Unu, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

This Month

As seen by some of its earliest practitioners, the defining task of "documentary" photography was recording the facts, creating images as anthropological or courtroom exhibits, reporting each scene in as deadpan a way as possible, without artistic intention. For contemporary practitioners, though, the definition has changed to include new threads, among them: social commentary, activism, the ironies of the street, urbex, and disappearing history, This month's featured artist shows that documentary-style photography also works beautifully as autobiographical, highly-emotional storytelling,

Marthanna Yater's project, *Growing Together,* delves into the lives of twin sisters, exploring family dynamics, contrasts, and the essence of the human experience. It also serves as a very personal report from a photographer who discovers the power of defining family on her own terms. The documentary is a decades-long chronicle of the sisters' evolution from childhood to adulthood, from kidstuff to motherhood and diverse creative careers. But in capturing their journey, Marthanna Yater not only documents their lives but also embarks on a transformative exploration of her own identity both as an artist and as a rather unique member of a family made by choice not genetics.

On October 7, 1984, I arrived at Penland School of Craft, nestled in the mountains of western North Carolina, to begin my first photography class. Shortly thereafter, my instructor introduced me to Wanda Levin, a local photographer, artist, and mother of six-year-old twins Hannah and Molly. With an educational background in Human and Child development and a love for children, I was keenly interested in photographing children in the rural community around Penland, and the Levins agreed to meet with me.

On a brisk, overcast, late October afternoon, I arrived at the Levin's property in Celo, a community in Yancey County. I maneuvered across a somewhat icy, trickling creek that meanders through their six acres and drove up the sparsely graveled, tree-lined drive leading to their modest, rustic mountain home. Deep shadows cast by Mt. Celo rendered the day dark far too early.

Wanda welcomed me at the door, warmly inviting me into their home. Upon entering the family room, I noticed Hannah first. Exhausted from a busy day of first grade, she was asleep on the couch. With her tousled curls cascading down her back and about her face, Molly exhibited a slight inquisitiveness, studying me as her hand clasped the side of a straight-back chair by the kitchen table. Rob, the twins' dad and glass artist, cheerfully greeted me before returning to prepare vegetables to add to a large pot of simmering lentil soup. Malcolm, one of the tabby cats, basked in the warmth of the crackling black pot-bellied wood stove and lounged on the couch by Hannah.

Art and multi-generational family photographs covered the walls of their cozy home, including images of the twins captured by Wanda. On a side table, a tape player sat surrounded by cassette tapes, some neatly stacked in a rack above and others strewn about. An old, hollowed-out wooden banjo frame hung above the radio, while guitar, fiddle, and flute cases scattered across the front room floor. Newspapers, magazines, hair barrettes, and schoolbooks cluttered the kitchen table.

While Hannah slept, Molly trustingly agreed to venture outside for photographs. After donning her parka and boots and fetching her doll, we chose the weathered rope swing hanging from the cherry tree between the house and Rob's studio for our photo location. The image of Molly on the swing, tenderly kissing her doll, was captured on the first roll of the film I shot of the Levins.

As darkness approached, we hurried back inside, welcomed by the warmth of the fire and family and the inviting aromas of simmering soup and burning wood. Hannah had awakened and was curious while Malcolm stretched and yawned, claiming the entire couch.

As night fell, Wanda graciously invited me to join them for supper. We gathered around the well-worn, wooden kitchen table, our story unfolding over handcrafted bowls of hot soup and blown-glass tumblers filled with crisp mountain spring water. This simple yet heartwarming meal began our profound connection.

NORTH CAROLINA
HAS
PRIDE IN JOB

Little did I realize that this supper was the genesis of a 34-year narrative encompassing the twins' lives, my photographic journey, and a deep emotional connection with the Levins. Over time, I became part of their family, and the twins affectionately referred to me as "Other Mother." I gained access to the inner sanctum of their lives—a privilege that deepened our bond. When I asked Wanda whether the relationship I shared with the girls was unsettling for her, she reassured me, "Marthanna, you fulfill a need in their lives. I am their mother, but they need others, too."

My attraction to the family life the Levins cultivated starkly contrasts with my upbringing. My older father, a military commander and a Southern Gentleman, was kind yet rarely emotive and often absent. My mother, on the other hand, was domineering, unstable, and in large part, unaware. The summer I turned 13, four years after they separated and remained separated, my parents adopted three children, siblings, ages 9, 10, and 11, placing the weight of responsibility predominantly on my shoulders within a tumultuous environment. My father continued to reside in a different state. Two days after my now younger siblings moved into our home, my biological older brother, age 16, left for a private school in yet another state.

My perspective of the twins' childhood and lives is idealized, evoking a sense of romantic innocence, intimacy, and poignancy. Despite their beautiful and secure upbringing and the cherished bond of twinship, Hannah and Molly have not been insulated from conflict. Heartache has echoed within the sanctuary of their connection and beyond its sacred confines. Our relationship has also experienced discord but remains resolute. My connection with Hannah and Molly is the closest to the experience of motherhood I will ever know. Through the kindness and love exhibited by the Levins over decades of our collective growth, I have shaped my understanding of what constitutes a family.

They Grew Up Playing There

Music is a stronghold in the Levin family. Papa Rob plays the guitar, mandolin, and fiddle and introduced his daughters to instruments early in their lives.

It was customary that songs from the tapes stacked in the rack above the tape player and strewn around the table serenaded the family. If music was not playing from tapes, Rob often had the radio on, listening to music, NPR, and the news. The girls grew up happily, singing, dancing around their living room, and playing instruments.

Also instilled in them was becoming stewards of the earth and political awareness. The Levins did not own a television, fortunately. The girls' "influencers" were their loving family, community, and the creativity present at Penland School of Craft, where their parents were resident artists when the girls were born, and where Rob taught many glass-blowing classes. The family had many artists as friends in the Celo community and the girls attended the alternative Arthur Morgan middle school.

Harmony is part of music. As I grew closer to the Levins, I compared musical harmony to the harmony in their family. I found this harmony refreshing, appealing, and in sharp contrast to my toxic family.

On a summer afternoon in 1990, when Hannah and Molly were twelve, Wanda, Hannah, Molly, and I arrived at North Carolina novelist John Ehle's cabin close to Penland to photograph. John was a friend of Wanda and Rob's as well as to many others in the Penland community. John granted me carte blanche permission to photograph at the cabin and showed me where he kept the key.

In this image, entitled "Sisters Devoted," the girls are playing dress-up. Hannah is wearing her paternal grandmother, Bette's, high school graduation dress with embroidery and cutwork. Molly, also dressed in white, enhances the scene with her flowing cascading curls. I often told Molly that her curls are public domain, and I hoped she never cut them.

Hannah was tired and closed her eyes and rested her head on the arm of the stuffed, weathered chair. She and Molly intertwined hands, an ordinary gesture for them, that exemplified their twin-sister bond. Like the early images from my documenting the twins, this was captured on film. It was the shot of the day.

The image is the cover photo for *Sisters: Devoted or Divided* by Susan Ripps, published by Kensington Press. With their dad's permission, I called the girls at school to tell them a photo of them would be on the front cover of a book published in New York. Molly remained silent. Hannah excitedly exclaimed, "Will it be in the grocery store check-out lanes for all my friends to see?"

Sisters Devoted

On a serene afternoon at the Levin's home, Wanda, cocooned in blankets and nestled in by twins, dozed. I quietly observed them through my camera lens, and the girls gazed at me with timeless, poetic expressions. This image radiates their tranquil, wholesome relationship with each other and their mother. Unlike Wanda's peaceful bond with her daughters, my mother's presence was a source of dread. I was always on guard, walking on eggshells, knowing that even a minor incident could trigger her irrational fury. Even at her best, she was unable to hide her unsound mind. At her worst, she could explode into disproportionate outbursts of rage and violence. Underneath her screaming and flailing was a tormented mind and a shattered child's desperate outcry for help. No one came to help her, and no one came to protect my siblings and me.

She was hostile, verbally, physically, and emotionally abusive, destructive, and a textbook narcissist. With an absent spouse who financially supported us but was not present for her or his biological children, her decision to adopt three non-biological children when she was unable to manage her own life and two teens was unreasonable and, yes, insane. Whether for benevolence, control, or both, the decision left a trail of emotional and psychological scars that my siblings carried to their graves and that remain with me today.

Without examples of consistent comparison, pandemonium was our "normal." It wasn't until my senior year in college, while researching and writing a paper on child abuse, that I had a profound realization that we grew up in a toxic and abusive family.

Cocoon

Western North Carolina mountain landscapes and the seasonal changes have been the backdrop for many photographs of our artistic journey and connection. Even when there is a whisper of spring, the late winter mountain air is chilling. The girls found solace in their warm, cozy nook on this nippy day. Molly pensively gazed out the window at the barren trees, abandoning the knitting needles and yarn in her lap. The twins' paternal grandmother taught the girls how to knit when they were thirteen. Draped with a hand-woven throw, Hannah nonchalantly perused photographs in one of the Levin's many art books. The clay pots on the window ledge reminded me that Rob was a potter before becoming a renowned glass artist.

Sometime later, and post-college days for the girls, we were casually gathered in Levin's kitchen. Hannah proudly pointed out that she was a melding of both parents and their talents as she played music and threw pots like her papa; she hugged her dad and hoped that someday she would be as skilled on the guitar as he. Hannah tenderly continued explaining that she mirrors her mother, too, as a photographer and teacher. Wanda's degree, like Hannah's, is in Studio Art and teaching. Hannah's master's is in teaching (MAT). Rob's undergraduate degree and MFA are in Art—no doubt there is a generational influence of family creativity and interests. As art professionals, we share a common thread of creativity. It is the tapestry that connects us, weaving together our unique and shared experiences and connection.

Harsh mountain winters eventually give way to refreshing spring warmth and delicate blossoms—a welcome relief from the seemingly endless dark, frigid winter days.

Through their childhood and teen years, this cherry tree, a steadfast companion, friend, and witness to their transformation, cradled the girls as they played in its branches and rested among the blossoms. It stood as a symbol of continuity and stability. I remember capturing a moment when Molly was six, holding her doll and sitting on a swing hung from the limb where she sits in this photograph as a teen.

Like the changing seasons, our lives also transition through stages. As teens, the girls emerged from their cocoons with wet wings, not ready to let go and fly alone. Still lovingly referred to as "the twins," they sought recognition as individuals. At fourteen, Hannah boldly proclaimed, "I am ME, not HER," as she stretched her wings in a quest for her identity. And Molly, at sixteen, bravely asserted her individuality by cutting her long, resplendent curls into a chic short style. Their statements and actions affirm the beauty and power of individuality and the journey toward independence, a journey that was made possible by the unwavering support of Wanda and Rob.

Whether it was the joy of scampering on river rocks at Carolina Hemlocks, playing dress up, strolling through the cool, damp woods at Roan Mountain, or the excitement of wiggling loose teeth, story-telling, drawing, performing skits, splashing in their wading pool, folding clothes, braiding each other's hair, sharing Thanksgivings, turkey soup and hot tea around the kitchen table, listening to their songs and guitar music by the bonfire on chilly mountain nights, weddings, maternity, business imagery, and sharing gallery openings of *Growing Together*, I was often with them and had the opportunity to capture some of the intimate everyday moments and special events in the Levins' lives.

In this image, Hannah and Molly are nineteen, their gap year, and their last year at home. They are readying their vibrant wings to take flight, a poignant reminder of the bittersweet emotions of children growing up. Although I am happy for them, I will miss these shared, happy, carefree years with them that I enjoyed and lived vicariously.

Sisterhood

On that sunny afternoon, September 3, 2005, Molly bid her final farewell to childhood. Her marriage to Damon altered her life and significantly shifted the dynamics of both families and friends. The energy changed, a new focus emerged, a new family was formed, and uncertainty posed the questions—what lies before us, and where do I belong now? I've realized these questions are for Molly and us all.

Although college years separated the twins geographically, marriage separated them differently. This image of Hannah hugging her sister is their last embrace before Molly begins a new chapter of life and changes her identity. No longer a child, going to her new home, no longer her parents' house, and with a new name, no longer Molly Levin.

In the day's flurry, I was a quiet observer, a guest. Before slipping away in the night, while dancing continued under the tent and twinkle lights, with my camera in hand, I looked through the lens, focused on Hannah but did not release the shutter. I wondered if Hannah was asking herself, "Where do I belong now?" I never asked her, but I think I will.

Molly's Wedding

A new life was about to enter the world, adding another dimension to the Levin and Rouse families. Molly, radiant with a pregnancy glow, was lovingly supported by her family, who had always been there for her throughout everyday life and, now, the pending birth of her child.

This image was taken on December 1, 2012, before a baby shower arranged by a few of Molly's Asheville friends. Instead of celebrating an upcoming new life, I was on my way to Tennessee to visit my older biological brother in skilled nursing care. He suffered permanent emotional scarring and damage caused by my mother. Emotionally lost, mentally unstable, and now physically unwell, he lacked the sweetness of life and seethed with envy and jealousy, destructive to his health and life. He never treated me well, desperate to dominate me since his life was out of control and he could not control the mother he despised. I knew this would be the last time I saw my brother alive.

As the life cycle continues, there is hope with a new life, yet death reclaims what was once given. Every family, without exception, faces its own unique set of challenges. No one is exempt. I am grateful for the unexpected turn at Penland that led me to the Levin family, where I witnessed gentle and sensible parenting, support for one another, communication, and unconditional love.

Life

Artist Interview - Marthanna Yater

You started out in Alaska. An Air Force kid. What do you remember?

"I am an Eskimo" seemed logical as a child since I was born in Alaska. My dad, an Air Force colonel, was at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage before I was born. I was a late child in my father's life. When my brother and I were small children and walked with him on an air base, airmen would salute and say, "Colonel, you sure have cute grandchildren." Tongue-in-cheek, my dad would quickly reply, "These are not my grandchildren; they are my great-grandchildren."

Marthanna Yater

My own tour in Alaska was short, four months. I don't remember anything from our next assignment, Kelly Field in San Antonio; my earliest memories are of Eglin AFB in Florida, and our house in Valparaiso, on the Choctawhatchee Bay. One of my earliest memories is of men attempting to pull an alligator they had roped out of the bay and shooting at it with rifles. Dogs in the area were missing; many were concerned that a gator might enjoy snacking on small children.

Military life usually means lots of travel. True for you?

Before I was five, we moved to Arnold AFB, in Tennessee, where my dad was the Inspector General at Arnold Engineering Development Complex. In the first five years of my life, I had lived in four states, although Alaska was not yet a state. After my parents separated, I lived in Arkansas, where my mother put us in a private religious school to shelter us from worldly temptation as we grew into teens. At 13, I was transferred to public school for 8th grade. Shortly after, we moved to Alabama for another even more conservative private school. This made four school changes in nine years and added two more states of residence.

For some of us, that would have been more than enough dislocation but you became a life-long traveler. Explain?

I went to a small religious college in Florida. After my sophomore year, my mother kicked me out of the house for hemming a dress an inch above the top of my knees. This was during Hot Pants, Mini Skirts, and the hippie revolution. I was told not to come home again until I repented. Whatever.

I grew up, completed college, got a job, married someone that my mother would despise, to spite her, divorced, bid adieu to the confines of the sterile corridors of the university, bought a backpack, and hit the road to attend the University of Life. FINALLY, I was living and attest that travel is the best well-rounded education.

Did this early mobility set the stage for my peripatetic future, or was I born for adventure? In my adult years, my dad told me that from the age of three, I showed my strength, stubbornness, and determination. Dad cautioned me about my stubborness, but my backbone of blue steel turned out to be a be a great asset.

Fine Arts and photography were not your first career destination.

My educational background is in human development and early childhood education. Child Development study provided a context for my own experience and insight into positive nurturing and support. I enjoyed working at the newspaper in typesetting and advertisement layouts after my freshman year at college. I served as a summer camp counselor for middle school kids for two summers and survived. I taught for a couple of years in Tennessee while taking graduate courses where I quickly learned that I enjoyed art and making books for children. I also discovered that I preferred working alone and creating quietly. Teaching skills served me well, but I continued searching for something more satisfying.

When did photography enter the picture?

Travel led me to photography and an epiphany.

With the proceeds of a life insurance policy for me from my dad, I had the good fortune to travel and backpack in Europe from late summer through October, 1978, after changing my life radically by bucking the stifling status quo and expectations for a Southern woman. A college friend and I, neither having previously traveled abroad, flew to London, purchased Eurail passes, and the adventures began. Standing before Buckingham Palace, I remember thinking, "I am looking at things I have only heard about or seen in books." It took me a while to digest that these "faraway places" were real, and I was seeing them firsthand.

After a few weeks of learning the ropes of travel together, my college friend went to Italy and, for the next six weeks, I was on my next adventure. I aced traveling solo and found great opportunites traveling as one vs. two. In Santorini, Greece, I shared a taxi to the harbor with a married couple and their

single cousin, Parisians headed for Crete. They invited me to Paris and gave me a handheld tour of the city. My new friend asked me live with him in Paris. He was kind and educated, but I was not long out of a suffocating marriage, searching for self, running with my hair in the wind, free and ALIVE. I had places to go. After a year with a job and a ski pass in Vail, Colorado, I heard the South Pacific call.

Definitely sounds like wanderlust to me!

LA, to Hawaii, American Samoa, and Sydney, followed by a visit to a friend I met in Greece and her family in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. I hitchhiked around Tasmania with a newly-made friend from Launceston. Off we went, thumbs extended. Throughout all my travels I carried a small, fixed-lens Konica film camera.

New Zealand, North Island

On the North Island, I worked on a sheep farm in Te Puke, the Kiwi capital of the world, during the shearing season. I enjoyed shifting sheep on a dirt bike but preferred a horse. I also cooked for the shearing team and farm family while the shearers were there. I cooked all day, making gallons of hot tea and sandwiches for morning and afternoon smoko (breaks), and cooked a hearty lunch of leg of lamb, chops, and

snags (sausages) for everyone. Dinner was less demanding since I cooked just for the family. They were fascinated with some of the American dishes I prepared. One was fried chicken. Their nine-year-old, an albino, had no idea what was on her plate, bit into a piece of fried chicken, and exclaimed, "There's chicken inside this."

Although both you and your camera were "non-pro" at the time, the pix from your travels must be extraordinary.

Here comes the epiphany!

I returned to Australia, hired a car, packed three days of water and food in case of a breakdown in the desert, and drove from Alice Springs across the desert's Red Center to Ayres Rock, *Uluru* to the Aborigines. *Uluru* and its neighbor *Kata Tjuta*, the *Olgas*, aren't just rocks but cultural landscapes deeply sacred to the Aboriginals. With two other travelers, I arrived in the late afternoon, poised to see the late afternoon light strike the red, monolithic, Ayers Rock.

Rain clouds formed and a light sprinkle began, even though it was not rainy season. I was distraught. I was at sacred *Uluru* and would not witness the evening sunlight strike the red rock. After the brief sprinkle of rain, sunlight burst through the broken clouds striking the rock. The sacred monolith was set ablaze. Dark gray clouds created a backdrop for *Uluru*, and suddenly, a double rainbow poured over the holy rock. In absolute awe, I shrieked, exclaiming what a gift it was to witness this once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon. The other two witnesses stood there expressionless.

The others didn't react at all to the stunning view. Most of my family had always discounted my "arty" side as worthless foolishness, but, I knew then that I was different. In that moment, it was revealed that there was an artist within.

Tell about your experience at Penland. It was a perfect place for you to get serious, right?

I had no background in art or photography until I found Penland School of Craft in the mountains of western North Carolina on my return to the States after overseas travel. I didn't want to go back to a university setting, so Penland was ideal for me. It was rural, quiet, and stimulating, with international students engaged in various studies. I took three concentration courses at Penland and became a core fellow. A core fellow works for the school in exchange for tuition, room, and board. The studios were open 24 hours a day, and students could work as much or as little as they chose. Some took classes for college credit, others for their desire to learn.

Professional growth is also personal growth. How did your time at Penland contribute?

My family had never supported or understood my art. My biological brother's attitude was, "She is the 'artsy' type and capable of nothing." He maintained that, as a man, he was superior and I, as a woman, was a second-class citizen. To my mother, it was, "just another one of her whims and she will never amount to anything." But I took some large, matted prints of my early work at Penland as a gift to Uncle Walter, my dad's artistic brother. He "got it." He understood, recognized my natural talent, and stated, "Sis, this is what you have been searching for, and I am behind you 100%."

After my first photo concentration at Penland, student work was exhibited in the photo gallery. One afternoon, as I passed through the gallery, a young man from the community stood weeping in front of one of my images. The image was of the twins. I saw immense pain in his face when he turned to me

and explained that the image reminded him of childhood innocence and his children to whom he had limited access. His pain impacted me, and I was astounded that a picture of mine, so early into photography, had evoked such intense emotion. It was a defining moment when I realized that my journey to becoming a successful photographer was interwoven with the ability to create images that could evoke similar deep-seated emotions. This realization became my personal measure of success.

Few of us have received that kind of positive reaction. A once-in-a-lifetime review!

Three years later, at one of my solo exhibits in Atlanta, *Women and Children First*, it happened again. A woman stood before one of my images in tears. Again, I realized one must possess a deep reservoir of emotion and personal experience to elicit such a strong reaction. But, I was standing close to the entry door when a man wandered into the gallery, turned his head to the left, then right, and growled, "Hmmm, dumb art," and huffed out. Art is subjective.

***Growing Together* is just one of several of your essays. I like the Iowa story that you say is "all about dirt." Tell the tale?**

I like story-telling images taken in organic settings, and the pictures of the children I photographed in rural Iowa awakened a longing to return to a simpler, more grounded life. I delight in seeing and photographing children in the elements, during moments of discovery. I like dirt because it is real. And children and dirt are made for each other.

I moved to Iowa and taught photography, storytelling, and experimental art, with a twist of science and geography. I spent four seasons in a community of 210 people, surrounded

by cornfields. The closest township had a population of 1200, no traffic lights, an impressive library for such a small population, an attentive librarian, a post office, two churches, a volunteer fire department, an elementary school, small town offices, one restaurant, and silos filled with corn.

Thirty Dirty Toes

I worked with and documented a multi-generational family that includes six children, five dogs, five sheep, and a velvety-soft, gray rabbit. The kids enjoyed a relaxed homeschool curriculum and unstructured time to explore the forest and creek, run barefoot laughing in the summer rain, memorize rainbows, dig in the dirt, jump in the mud, catch frogs, break sticks, sail their boats (leaves) in mud puddles, chase lightning bugs, watch ants with fascination, play in the sprinkler, and run in the sunshine with their dogs. In winter, they make snow creatures, eat icicles, roll in the snow and make snow angels, have snowball fights, and dream of a white Christmas. They work hard and play freely. They live a life where getting dirty is part of a healthy day, a happy childhood, device-free, and tuned

in to nature. They possess excellent life skills and hold deep values and respect for others and their community. They know how to plant, tend, and harvest a garden, cook and preserve food, and they learn from the master teacher and artist herself—Mother Earth.

There's also a "business" side to your photography, often working with children. Any advice for future kid photographers?

Authenticity is key. Children immediately sense if you're not genuine. If you don't enjoy photographing children, that's okay. Find something you do enjoy photographing. We're all different. But remember, being a stuffy adult will kill a shoot with a child.

I am childlike and playful and connect with kids on their level. This approach helps develop a relationship with them, and once they trust me, they are comfortable and open up to the camera with ease. Some are completely unaware of the camera while we are engaged. Kids like attention, and if one makes getting the child's picture fun, pays full attention to them, and interests them with objects and their environment,

they respond. Give them something to do and PRAISE THEM.

I used to wear Mickey Mouse shirts when I photographed children. They could relate to the playful, whimsical character. A child once gave me the ultimate compliment. "You are like a kid."

What's next? Travel? A place you've dreamed of going? Somewhere to which you'd return? A new project? A book? A rest?

Photography has been my focus, my career, and artistic expression for 41 years, and I miss the earlier days. I miss the magic of printing in the darkroom, split toning, and hand-tinting with oils on fiber paper. Hand-tinting came easy to me, and I like the effect. I enjoyed sitting at the drafting table with the oils and brushes and painting on the photograph. I like the oils' smell and the hands-on process. I may return to this once in a while. Hand-tinting is time-consuming, but the end results are worth the effort. Sorry, digital, you can't compete.

My life's main project is the twins, *Growing Together*, and secondary is the Iowa project, *Close to the Earth*. Reflecting on my life and these two projects, I see a clear underlying theme and yearning for a more authentic yesteryear.

Regarding dreams of what's next or places to travel, I fantasize about returning to New Zealand, Tasmania, and Greece, but I can't return to how life was in the late 70s. The world has changed, and maybe not for the better.

I used to live for adventure. My veins were filled with jet fuel, and I was ready for action. I am grateful for the opportunities I had in my youth. I am fortunate to have had that time to learn and grow and to enrich my life for a lifetime. Age changes us. Now, I am content to stay closer to my base, with an occasional

car trip to visit a friend or to the ocean to bathe in the sounds of the sea.

I have found a new interest in serving others, especially senior citizens with some level of dementia. I find deep satisfaction in knowing that I make a difference in their lives sometimes with small gestures and by showing them kindness and loving support. In my youth, I was on a quest to find myself. Now, I realize the truth in Gandhi's words.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." – Mahatma Gandhi

End notes

To Wanda, Rob, Hannah, and Molly Levin, thank you for the years we shared as we grew together over the decades. Your gentle kindness changed my life. To Hannah and Molly's partners and families, I am deeply grateful for the love and support you bring into their lives. It is not just a privilege, but a joy to know you and be a part of your extended family: Molly, Damon, and children Oscar, Alma, and Lia -- Hannah, David, and children Otis and Juniper. There were positive aspects of growing up with my siblings. Today, I am fortunate to have Nancy and Johnathan, my niece and nephew, and children in my life. We are bonded in love.

No one has to look far within a family to find those struggling with mental health issues. Mental health support and help are more readily available today than in the past. Millions suffer from mental challenges, and relief is available. Reach out. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Unfortunately, those who need the most help tend to refuse it, professing that they do not have a problem and that the problem lies with others, usually those closest to them.

Contact

www.marthannayaterphotography.com

marthannay (at) icloud (dot) com

facebook.com/pages/Marthanna-Yater-Photography/206958173166

https://instagram.com/marthannayater

https://www.linkedin.com/in/marthanna-yater-3b404121

Support Dek Unu

Not-for-profit, non-advertising, *Dek Unu Magazine* promotes accomplished, adventurous fine art photography internationallly in eleven print and online editions each year. The magazine provides extraordinary creative freedom to our artists but we depend on print sales and donations to pay for the registrations, licenses, and subscriptions required to turn out each month's issue. To donate in any amount, please find us at: PayPal (@dekunuarts) or Dek Unu Arts, 1618 San Silvestro Drive, Venice, FL 34285

Thank you for your support!

https://www.dekunumag.com
https://www.dekunuarts.com

©*Dek Unu Magazine*, a division of Dek Unu Arts,
1618 San Silvestro Drive, Venice, Florida 34285, United States of America.
Dek Unu Magazine, @2017-2025 Dek Unu Arts, all rights reserved. Unless noted, copyright for included images are owned by each artist and used by permission.

Dek Unu Magazine is published online at https://www.dekunumag.com and in print on demand through Magcloud, a division of Blurb, Inc. Please see guidelines for submissions at https://www.dekunumag.com/submit and direct questions regarding the publication process to dekkunumag@gmail.com. Other correspondence: dekunu@dekunumag.com.

Dek Unu
Arts

www.dekunumag.com

©2025 Venice, Florida
All Rights Reserved